

## **Report**

DARN *Plan on a Page* Meeting  
June 16, 2016

Seven DARN volunteers met to complete the *Plan on a Page* assignment—to craft a 10 to 20 year vision for the downtown, recognize strengths and challenges of living downtown, and identify items over which residents have influence and can work on themselves. When approved by the DARN Steering Committee, these ideas and suggestions will be fed into the current comprehensive planning process of the City of Asheville.

DARN volunteers completed eight sections of the *Plan on a Page* as follows:

1. Neighborhood Description. The downtown neighborhood is located in the center of the City of Asheville. The committee identified the boundaries as I-240 on the north, Ashland Ave. on the west, Southside on the south, and College St. at the west side of the tunnel on the east. Members speculated about proposed changes to the boundaries that would bring the South Slope into the downtown neighborhood.
2. Neighborhood History. DARN was founded in 2005 to bring downtown residents together as neighbors, and to give them a voice in community issues. DARN sponsors neighborhood social functions, communicates with City officials on topics of concern to its members, and works with other organizations to make living downtown a positive experience. Current DARN Goals are: noise issues, a cleaner downtown, strengthen downtown livability, communicate with membership, provide social and networking opportunities and the beautification of Pritchard Park.

[For the next four sections, attendees brainstormed responses to each section, then ranked the top three as follows: 1 = most important; 2 = 2nd most important; and, 3 = 3<sup>rd</sup> most important. In tabulating these results, the rankings were reversed as follows: 1 = 3 pts.; 2 = 2 pts.; and, 3 = 1 pt. This reversal made the scores more intuitive; thus, the highest score was the overall first choice and so on.] Each total score does not necessarily sum to 42 (7 attendees x 6 awarded point because not all attendees awarded all 6 possible points.)

3. Neighborhood Vision. Attendees listed four factors they feel describe what they hoped for the future of downtown Asheville. These are listed here as they were ranked (the score each received is in parenthesis).

(17) *Asheville's Character*. The downtown's charm is preserved including, but not limited to, the architecture, view of the mountains, diverse populations as well as its weird personality.

(11) *Parking/Transportation*. Asheville's need for additional parking should be met, not by additional core parking ramps, but by the development of peripheral parking lots which are connected via a continuous transportation loop system (e.g., trams, shuttle busses) that carry passengers to different locations around the CBD. In addition, a traffic plan should limit auto traffic flow to certain streets and maximize walkways and bikeways.

(6) *Diverse Housing*. Downtown Asheville attracts more residents because of its diverse housing options and availability of "workforce housing," especially for service industry workers.

(2) *Energy*. The energy needs of the downtown are met by Duke Energy which provides "visual protection" of its facilities and without harming residential areas.

4. Neighborhood Strengths. Attendees listed seven strengths of the downtown neighborhood. The biggest strength of the downtown was seen to be its unique character.

(18) The downtown neighborhood is unusual compared with other small cities because it is walkable, providing good accessibility to local arts and crafts, theatre, movies, shopping, good restaurants and cafes.

(7) Many independent, locally owned businesses exist, with a notable lack of chain stores and restaurants.

(3) The attitude and personality of residents and shop owners is friendly, involved, inclusive and open to different people (including buskers) and diverse cuisines.

(3) The local focus on the arts, crafts and design also contributes to the vitality, energy and appeal of the downtown.

(2) The downtown just hired a Downtown Development Strategist.

5. Neighborhood Challenges. Six distinct challenges/problems were listed by those attending the meeting. By far the biggest problem was judged to be downtown sidewalks.

(13) The sidewalks in many places around the downtown are hazardous. Although in some places, such as around the Grove Arcade and on Walnut and Broadway, the raised and broken concrete slabs have been painted, they still are a great danger, especially to the older and physically challenged residents of the neighborhood.

(6) Additional safe and welcoming green space is needed in downtown, places where permanent residents can meet and enjoy the out-of-doors. The “pit of despair” should be a welcoming entrance to the Haywood St. corridor with grass, shade trees, and benches for residents to enjoy. This is not to preclude the possibility of mixed-use development which, if implemented, should reflect the low rise, diverse character of downtown, while providing significant green space.

(6) Additional parking is a continuous problem, one that needs to be solved in the immediate future. A trolley or tram system taking residents and tourists from one part of downtown to another would be a big help.

(6) The homeless population—both our chronic homeless as well as “world travelers”—need expanded services. Although we realize this challenge probably will not and cannot ever be solved completely, as a city we can do better.

(3) We need to attract more residents. This would set in motion a cycle that would attract more services such as a grocery, cleaners, and drug store, which would in turn attract more residents, etc.

(2) More public bathrooms are essential.

6. Neighborhood Responsibility. The attendees felt that most of the challenges and problems they had identified were things that only the City could solve; however, they saw a role for DARN members in five areas.

(12) DARN should put more emphasis on attending City Council meetings and lobbying for the needs and preferences of downtown residents.

(8) Residents can regularly patronize and support downtown local businesses as much as possible.

(4) Residents can promote “the Asheville Attitude” and market this concept.

(4) Residents can continue and even increase their clean-up efforts in Pritchard Park and other public spaces; Groups of residents can develop an “adopt a small space” program.

(2) Residents can continue and even increase their involvement in local NGOs, especially those serving our homeless.

7. Alignment with Council Goals. The six areas attendees decided needed improvement align well with the City’s vision:

DARN’S Vision	Council’s Goals
Safe Sidewalks	A Well-Planned and Livable Community
Safe and welcoming green space	A Well-Planned and Livable Community
Additional parking	Thriving Local Economy
Our Homeless	A Clean and Healthy Environment
Attracting more residents	Quality Affordable Housing
Additional public bathrooms	A Clean and Healthy Environment

8. Alignment with Asheville City Development Plan 2025 Goals. Although the six areas attendees identified as challenges are more specific than the City’s development plans, nevertheless, they fit well within these plans.

DARN’S Vision	City’s Plans
Safe Sidewalks	City Services Plan
Safe and welcoming green space	Central City Plan
Additional parking	Center City Plan
Our Homeless	City Services
Attracting more residents	Economic Development
Additional public bathrooms	City Services